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PIKE COUNTY BALLADS.

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LITTLE BREECHES.

I DON'T go much on religion,
I never ain't had no show;
But I 've got a middlin' tight grip sir,
On the handful o' things I know.
I don't pan out on the prophets
And free-will, and that sort of thing,—
But I b'lieve in God and the angels,
Ever sence one night last spring.

I come into town with some turnips,
And my little Gabe come along,—
No four-year-old in the county
Could beat him for pretty and strong,
Peart and chipper and sassy,
Always ready to swear and fight,—
And I 'd larnt him to chaw terbacker
Jest to keep his milk-teeth white.

LITTLE BREECHES.

The snow come down like a blanket
  As I passed by Taggart's store;
I went in for a jug of molasses
  And left the team at the door.
They scared at something and started,—
  I heard one little squall,
And hell-to-split over the prairie
  Went team, Little Breeches, and all.

Hell-to-split over the prairie!
  I was almost froze with skeer;
But we rousted out some torches,
  And sarched for 'em far and near.
At last we struck hosses and wagon,
  Snowed under a soft white mound,
Upsot, dead beat,—but of little Gabe
  No hide nor hair was found.

And here all hope soured on me,
  Of my fellow-critter's aid,—
I jest flopped down on my marrow-bones,
  Crotch-deep in the snow, and prayed.

. . . . .

By this, the torches was played out,
And me and Isrul Parr
Went off for some wood to a sheep-fold
That he said was somewhar thar.

We found it at last, and a little shed
Where they shut up the lambs at night.
We looked in and seen them huddled thar,
So warm and sleepy and white;
And THAR sot Little Breeches and chirped,
As peart as ever you see,
"I want a chaw of terbacker,
And that's what's the matter with me."

How did he git thar? Angels.
He could never have walked in that storm.
They jest scooped down and toted him
To whar it was safe and warm.
And I think that saving a little child,
And bringing him to his own,
Is a derned sight better business
Than loafing around The Throne.

JIM BLUDSO,

OF THE PRAIRIE BELLE.

WALL, no, I can't tell whar he lives,
Becase he don't live, you see;
Leastways, he's got out of the habit
Of livin' like you and me.
Whar have you been for the last three year
That you have n't heard folks tell
How Jimmy Bludso passed in his checks
The night of the Prairie Belle?

He were n't no saint,—them engineers
Is all pretty much alike,—
One wife in Natchez-under-the-Hill
And another one here, in Pike;
A keerless man in his talk was Jim,
And an awkward hand in a row,
But he never flanked, and he never lied,—
I reckon he never knowed how.

And this was all the religion he had,—
To treat his engine well;
Never be passed on the river;
To mind the pilot's bell;
And if ever the Prairie Belle took fire,—
A thousand times he swore,
He'd hold her nozzle agin the bank
Till the last soul got ashore.

All boats has their day on the Mississip,
And her day come at last,—
The Movastar was a better boat,
But the Belle she *would n't* be passed
And so she come tearin' along that night—
The oldest craft on the line—
With a nigger squat on her safety-valve,
And her furnace crammed, rosin and pine.

The fire bust out as she cleared the bar,
And burnt a hole in the night,
And quick as a flash she turned, and made
For that willer-bank on the right.

There was runnin' and cursin', but Jim yelled out,
  Over all the infernal roar,
"I 'll hold her nozzle agin the bank
  Till the last galoot 's ashore."

Through the hot, black breath of the burnin' boat
  Jim Bludso's voice was heard,
And they all had trust in his cussedness,
  And knowed he would keep his word.
And, sure 's you 're born, they all got off
  Afore the smokestacks fell,—
And Bludso's ghost went up alone
  In the smoke of the Prairie Belle.

He were n't no saint,—but at jedgment
  I 'd run my chance with Jim,
'Longside of some pious gentlemen
  That would n't shook hands with him.
He seen his duty, a dead-sure thing,—
  And went for it thar and then;
And Christ ain't a going to be too hard,
  On a man that died for men.

BANTY TIM.

(REMARKS OF SERGEANT TILMON JOY TO THE WHITE MAN'S COMMITTEE OF SPUNKY POINT, ILLINOIS.)

I RECKON I git your drift, gents,—
You 'low the boy sha' n't stay;
This is a white man's country;
You 're Dimocrats, you say;
And whereas, and seein', and wherefore,
The times bein' all out o' j'int,
The nigger has got to mosey
From the limits o' Spunky P'int!

Le's reason the thing a minute:
I 'm an old-fashioned Dimocrat too,
Though I laid my politics out o' the way,
For to keep till the war was through.

But I come back here, allowin'
  To vote as I used to do,
Though it gravels me like the devil to train
  Along o' sich fools as you.

Now dog my cats ef I kin see,
  In all the light of the day,
What you 've got to do with the question
  Ef Tim shill go or stay.
And furder than that I give notice,
  Ef one of you tetches the boy,
He kin check his trunks to a warmer clime
  Than he 'll find in Illanoy.

Why, blame your hearts, jest hear me!
  You know that ungodly day
When our left struck Vicksburg Heights, how ripped
  And torn and tattered we lay.
When the rest retreated I stayed behind,
  Fur reasons sufficient to me,—
With a rib caved in, and a leg on a strike,
  I sprawled on that damned glacee.

Lord! how the hot sun went for us,
  And br'iled and blistered and burned!
How the Rebel bullets whizzed round us
  When a cuss in his death-grip turned!
Till along toward dusk I seen a thing
  I could n't believe for a spell:
That nigger — that Tim — was a crawlin' to me
  Through that fire-proof, gilt-edged hell!

The Rebels seen him as quick as me,
  And the bullets buzzed like bees;
But he jumped for me and shouldered me,
  Though a shot brought him once to his knees;
But he staggered up, and packed me off,
  With a dozen stumbles and falls,
Till safe in our lines he drapped us both,
  His black hide riddled with balls.

So, my gentle gazelles, thar's my answer,
  And here stays Banty Tim:
He trumped Death's ace for me that day,
  And I'm not goin' back on him;

You may rezoloot till the cows come home,
But ef one of you tetches the boy,
He 'll wrastle his hash to-night in hell,
Or my name 's not Tilmon Joy!

THE MYSTERY OF GILGAL.

THE darkest, strangest mystery
I ever read, or heern, or see,
Is 'long of a drink at Taggart's Hall,—
Tom Taggart's of Gilgal.

I 've heern the tale a thousand ways,
But never could git through the maze
That hangs around that queer day's doin's;
But I 'll tell the yarn to youans.

Tom Taggart stood behind his bar,
The time was fall, the skies was far,
The neighbors round the counter drawed,
And calmly drinked and jawed.

At last come Colonel Blood of Pike,
And old Jedge Phinn, permiscus-like,
And each, as he meandered in,
Remarked, "A whisky-skin."

Tom mixed the beverage full and far,
And slammed it, smoking, on the bar;
Some says three fingers, some says two,—
I 'll leave the choice to you.

Phinn to the drink put forth his hand;
Blood drawed his knife, with accent bland,
"I ax yer parding, Mister Phinn—
Jest drap that whisky-skin."

No man high-toneder could be found
Than old Jedge Phinn the country round.
Says he, "Young man, the tribe of Phinns
Knows their own whisky-skins!"

He went for his 'leven-inch bowie knife:—
"I tries to foller a Christian life;
But I 'll drap a slice of liver or two,
My bloomin' shrub, with you."

They carved in a way that all admired,
Tell Blood drawed iron at last, and fired.
It took Seth Bludso 'twixt the eyes,
Which caused him great surprise.

Then coats went off, and all went in;
Shots and bad language swelled the din;
The short, sharp bark of Derringers,
Like bull-pups, cheered the furse.

They piled the stiffs outside the door;
They made, I reckon, a cord or more.
Girls went that winter, as a rule,
Alone to spellin'-school.

I 've sarched in vain, from Dan to Beer-
Sheba, to make this mystery clear;
But I end with *hit* as I did begin,—
"WHO GOT THE WHISKY-SKIN?"